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ABSTRACT

This position paper presents a discussion of "academic child abuse," defined as the use of practices that cause unnecessary failure of groups of students in foundation skill and knowledge areas. Part 1 articulates the fundamental problems with the decision-making practices of school districts and other agencies charged with teaching children. These problems fall into two categories: first, problems with standards created and applied by the agencies, including standards that are too broad, that are unattainable or unreasonable, that are for practices not outcomes, and that are overspecified; and, second, problems with operational practices relating to data which stem from the lack of respect for data by educational leaders. Examples from the California State Board of Education illustrate this disregard for data. Part 1 also summarizes negative practices which reveal the basic philosophy of decision-makers and describes how problems with standards and data lead to academic child abuse. Part 2 provides suggestions for correcting the structural problems within schools to reduce the instances of academic child abuse. The basic strategy involves holding decision-makers completely accountable for student performance. Suggestions include restricting standards to outcomes, focusing initial reform efforts on grades 1 through 4, and removing administrators who fail to honor traditions of scholarship and sensible scientific practices. Also offered are suggestions for challenging proposals by educational leaders and for shaping professional organizations, major school districts, and publishers. (Contains 24 references.) (DB)

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Academic Child Abuse

by The Study Group, International Institute for Advocacy for School Children

Barbara Bateman, Chair

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Introduction

This position paper is divided into two parts. Part 1 articulates the fundamental problems with the decision-making practices of school districts and other agencies charged with teaching children. The problems fall into two categories: problems with **standards** created and applied by the agencies and problems with the operational practices that relate to **data.** Part 1 also describes how the problems with standards and data lead to child abuse.

Part 2 provides suggestions for correcting the structural problems within schools so that they will be able to reduce the instances of academic child abuse.

Academic child abuse is defined as: the use of practices that cause unnecessary failure in foundation skill-and-knowledge areas.

The definition is limited to "foundation" skills, and the definition applies to **groups** of students, not individuals. The designation of "unnecessary failure" is based on a comparison of what is judged possible with the same school budget and the same setting, but with different practices.

The assumption of child abuse derives from the fact that when foundation skills (or knowledge) are not in place, the student is preempted from the benefits of instruction that depend on these skills. For instance, if a student cannot "decode" accurately, the student is preempted from "comprehending" the messages that are contained in written material. If the student does not understand basic equation operations, the student is preempted from solving problems that require basic operations.

The notion of child abuse implies that there is suffering associated with the treatment a child receives. The lasting effects of failure in foundation skills is lavishly supported by the literature (Stanovich, 1986). Students who fail to learn decoding in a timely fashion (by the end of the second grade) fall dramatically behind in other school areas, have a low self-image, have negative attitudes about school and learning, and often require "special" treatment (summer school and the like). The student's family is also subjected to both pain and expense.

Furthermore, there is permanent damage to the child. The probability of the child ever becoming highly proficient in reading after failing in the first two years is highly unlikely (Stanovich, 1986).

Within the broad category of academic child abuse are several categories of practices that are particularly inexcusable. One is **elitism,** which is defined as the installation of approaches that succeed with less than one-third of the school population. Decision-makers who install and maintain such approaches are prima facie insensitive to the academic and psychological needs of children. Ironically, most of the more popular educational practices are elitist and discriminatory in nature because less than one-third of the students progress as rapidly as reformers and decision-makers had promised. In math, for instance, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) findings of 1990 revealed that six out of seven students performed more than one year below grade level by the eighth grade. The math programs that had been installed are elitist and ineffective.

Although academic child abuse is the result of specific experiences that children have in specific classrooms, classroom teachers are not judged to be responsible for academic child abuse. The position of the International Institute for Advocacy for School Children (I'ASC) is that teachers are scapegoats for problems within the schools. The cry following reforms that fail centers largely around "upgrading teachers," with no particularly enlightened methods for achieving this goal. (Paying them more does not make them more competent.) Yet teachers have done only what they have been permitted or encouraged to do. Teachers are, therefore, victims who have been the target of propaganda about "how children learn," "which approaches are effective," and "which approaches are appropriate for the well-intentioned teacher." This propaganda comes directly from (a) decision-makers within the district and (b) professional organizations, such as the National Council of Teachers of English (1987), and the International Reading Association (Bussis, 1985; Carbo, 1988).

I'ASC assumes that teachers are doing the very best they can do (or are permitted to do) and that they simply serve as the medium for transmitting the decisions made at the district level. Those at the district level are considered as being **solely responsible** for whatever academic child abuse occurs in different classrooms. It is the mission of I'ASC to reveal these decision-makers for their unprofessionalism and to exert maximum pressure to assure that they are not permitted to continue making irresponsible decisions about the future of our children.

PART 1—PROBLEMS

Agencies that make decisions about what students are to be taught sometimes give the appearance of being professional. Their practices, however, are unparalleled by any legitimate profession. The most serious problems that set education apart are (a) the lack of appropriate **standards** that can be used to monitor progress of students and disclose academic child abuse and (b) the lack of concern with **data.** This section deals with the more serious problems of standards. A second section, Interpreting Data, discusses more serious problems with data.

Standards

There are four major abuses of standards that are routinely followed by educational agencies. Each abuse contributes to confusion and prevents educational agencies from learning about the details of instruction.

The four major problems are: standards that are too broad; unattainable or unreasonable standards; standards for practices, not outcomes; and overspecified standards that override specifications of curricula.

1. Standards that are too broad. The problem with these standards is that they lead to tabloid conclusions. The standard may reject "skill-based curricula" on the basis that some skill-based curricula present difficulties. Rejecting skill-based curricula, however, goes far beyond the evidence that the decision-makers have. When an agency specifies broad standards, it becomes difficult for the agency to identify which instructional details, parts, specific practices, or activities should be retained, which scrapped, and which modified; therefore, the educational leadership deals in tabloid logic and categorical rejections without knowledge of what is being rejected and what the alternatives are. An example is the current trends in instruction to reject "tracking" (California State Board of Education, 1988); however, the educational leaders used **their own version** of tracking, not tracking alternatives that had been shown to be effective. Their rejection of "tracking" assumes that no tracking practices are desirable or preferable to other alternatives. This may not be the case.

2. Standards that are unattainable or unreasonable. Many school-district and state standards are unreasonable because they have not been demonstrated to be uniformly productive or achievable. In Connecticut, for instance, third-graders are required to learn to take notes—although the typical third-grader writes at the rate of about 11 words per minute and does not have either the reading ability or the organizational skills needed to take notes on any significant material. Similar standards result from the school's inability to teach certain skills. For example, fractions are now scheduled for the first grade in many districts. The reason is that the adopted teaching for fractions has failed in the third and fourth grades (Research Advisory Committee, 1988). Therefore, decision-makers simply stipulate that fractions will be taught at an earlier grade, with the hope that some magical learning will occur. The actual outcome is attenuation of important topics that are appropriately taught and an increase in academic child abuse.

3. Standards for practices, not outcomes. Educational leaders who promote "standards" often confuse teaching practices with "outcome standards." For example, they may mandate "discovery" activities as part of math instruction (NCTM Standards, 1989). Typically, this mandate does not mean that the students will become good at discovering or that there is any performance criteria at all associated with their performance. It means that activities of a certain form are mandated. Instead of **providing** students with information about how to solve problems of a particular type, the decision-makers require students to **"discover"** something about it. According to the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, this type of practice reinforces the confusion of means and ends among educational leaders (IAEEA, 1987). If a certain performance level of "discovery" is established as a desired **outcome** and if it seems reasonable (based on demonstrations that it is uniformly achievable through some form of instructional practices), the standard is acceptable. Note, however, that the standard should not mandate **how** the outcome is to be achieved. That is a question of empirical data.

Another example of standards mandating the "how" of instruction occurs when standards require "formats" such as heterogeneous classrooms. These "formats" result in academic child abuse, because the standard is "not negotiable." To challenge the standard is to challenge a "principle" of supposed equity. To suggest tracking is perceived as promoting discrimination. In fact, standards that are not confined to **outcome performance** are greatly discriminatory because they do not allow the district to entertain the possibility that their standard is the cause of serious problems within the classroom. In California, for instance, all children of the same age are supposed to be placed in the same classroom for instruction and learn from the same lesson—even though some of them may not be able to understand English (and the lesson is presented in English). Some students are performing on the first-grade level and the activities may be appropriate for fifth graders. (See Gonzales,

1988.) If it is given that Juan and Virginia are to "study the same lesson," even though Juan has neither the skills nor the understanding of English needed to learn anything productive from this experience, Juan will be punished by failing. Yet the decision-makers treat this failure as an unimportant detail, compared to the assumed benefits that derive from the standard of requiring all students to be in the same classroom and study the same lock-step lesson.

When **practices** are mandated through "standards" or through district guidelines, tabloid reasoning and false dilemmas are guaranteed because the baby is now part of the bath water. If "discovery learning" practices are mandated as a method of instruction (without reference to student performance outcomes), the question *"Are there more effective alternatives to achieving proficiency in discovery?"* is totally preempted. The question cannot be raised, because any programs accepted by the district will meet the criterion of discovery learning.

Perhaps the most pernicious aspect of the tabloid-reasoning cycle is that the tabloid categories become commandments for drawing conclusions about other approaches, the motives of others, and a range of tertiary issues that derive from chosen definitions and "standards." In the broadest sense, educational leaders engage in rhetorical battles with those who suggest that adopted practices are not producing the results that are implied by the initiative that was adopted. For instance, someone suggesting that "manipulatives" represent a waste of time is attacked as being anti-discovery or possibly even anti-childhood, even if the protagonist is a researcher who has shown that the manipulative activities take unreasonable amounts of time and do not provide for the promised transfer to symbolic work (Evans, 1990).

4. Overspecified standards. A related problem is that when districts specify "month-to-month" teaching schedules in the form of "guidelines" or "strands," the district often preempts effective instruction. In New Jersey, for instance, the syllabus of topics is presented for subjects such as math. The teacher who follows these specifications cannot follow the specification of any program that sequences material in a different manner. Sequencing topics in a different manner may produce superior results. Even if the teacher is using an effective program, therefore, the teacher may produce needless academic child abuse because of the contradictory requirements imposed by the district standards. This problem could be easily corrected if the district standards were not presented as teaching practices but rather as outcomes that could be tested at the end of the school year, or tested in a way that is consistent with the particular instructional programs used in the classroom. Limiting the standards to performance tests at the end of the year would reduce the possibility of rejecting a program because it fails to meet standards. The possibility is eliminated that the program is rejected because it fails to meet standards that are not really outcome standards but teaching specifications. The practice would also permit the district to try out a broader range of programs without having to deal with problems of whether the programs conform to district standards of what is taught when and how.

Paradoxes

The unenlightened nature of standards and guidelines used by districts leads to the paradox of rejection. This paradox occurs when the district is failing seriously but cannot consider effective programs because these programs do not meet district guidelines. The established standards function as obstacles that effectively rule out productive alternatives. For instance, a school district is producing a typically pathetic job of teaching fraction relationships (fewer than 15% of eighth-graders are able to solve this problem: $\frac{1}{4} - \frac{1}{4}$). At the same time, the district has elaborate "standards" that indicate what must be done in the teaching of fractions. The standards indicate, for example, that the terms "numerator" and "denominator" will be used whenever referring to the parts of a fraction. The district is presented with a demonstratedly effective program for teaching fraction skills. This program does not initially refer to "numerator" and "denominator" but to "top number" and "bottom number." The program does not meet district guidelines and is therefore rejected. The result is that the district continues to create unnecessary academic child abuse.

District decision-making practices also lead to the paradox of evaluation. The district develops criteria for evaluating instructional programs. The criteria, for the most part, have nothing to do with outcomes but rather with "features" of the material to be adopted. In California, for instance, the Research Advisory Committee 1988 Framework indicated that the adopted programs meet criteria such as: "[The program] guides students through a range of thinking processes (e.g., evaluating, comparing, concluding, inferring, analyzing, and summarizing) without using a hierarchical approach (i.e., assuming that students must acquire one type of thinking before being able to deal with another type.)" The criterion is reduced to vacuous rhetoric by the simple fact that some exercises will occur in the instructional sequence before others. If the earlier exercises are easier or more proper for the beginning student (a large percentage of students succeeding), there is an assumption of "hierarchy." If the earlier exercises are harder or as hard as later exercises, the program is not designed to teach. Starting fourth-graders with this type of problem does not lead to successful teaching:

$$\frac{\frac{1}{2}}{\frac{3}{8}}$$

Note, however, that the criterion deals with instructional design. The fact that districts fail to teach students well suggests that they are not knowledgeable about instructional design. Therefore, the instructional-design requirements that are imposed by the standards are usually naive. The probable result is that programs that meet the criteria will be ineffective and will create academic child abuse.

A related problem is the paradox of the evaluators. Typically, those who evaluate programs are teachers who are at risk in the sense that their students fail to meet high standards. For them to evaluate a program, the evaluation would have to be expressed in details that they understand. These are **not** details of instructional design or of student-teacher interactions. Rather, they are details of evidence.

Is there evidence to prompt the belief that this product (program) will do better than what we have now?

Given that the program addresses the major aspects of a subject, does not seem to promote things that are immoral, and has evidence to support that it works well, the program should be given a fair chance, not rejected on the basis of face-value standards. In most settings, however, the paradox of the evaluators is a parallel to that of the paradox of rejection.

The paradox of evaluators:

> We are failing to teach X. The purpose of the evaluation is to identify an approach that will teach X.
>
> The submitted programs are evaluated by those who have never successfully and uniformly taught X.
>
> The only "standards" available to these evaluators are district standards or some sort of "face-value" inspection rules.
>
> Therefore, the evaluators of the program are not provided with standards that will yield a valid evaluation of whether the material has substantial potential to successfully teach X.

Summary

If there are effective programs or instructional approaches that produce superior results, most school districts and other adopting agencies would never discover these alternatives because of their arrogant treatment of standards. Their standards are not limited to outcomes expressed in terms of what students will be able to do after a reasonable period of time. Their standards have not been documented through fieldtests that demonstrate both the practicality of the particular standards and their consistency with program approaches that are superior. Rather, their standards are the product of "philosophy." They deal with practices ("the use of manipulatives" . . . "immersion in 'problem solving' "), instructional design ("the use of literature to teach beginning reading"), and schedules of events that effectively override whatever specifications the adopted instructional program provides.

An overwhelming number of decision-makers have never demonstrated that they can achieve superior or even acceptable results with students. Furthermore, they have never "tested" their standards to determine the extent to which effective teaching alternatives are preempted by adopted "standards."

Decision-makers should be required to formulate standards that are simple and are limited to outcomes (with demurs to questions of obvious immorality, gross misstatements of facts, and the like). The primary criteria for adopting practices should be: Does it work well with children? Does it work well for teachers? These are questions of **fact** that can be documented.

The extent to which decision-makers are permitted to introduce standards that simply promote their philosophical prejudices is the extent to which these decision-makers are permitted to create academic child abuse by failing to consider approaches that are effective. In practice, the decision-makers indicate through their standards that they consider their philosophy more important than effective outcome with children. Their prejudices affect teachers within the district, who continue to be naive about instruction because they are **denied access to effective instruction and the facts about what works and what doesn't.** Most typically, teachers are required to use approaches that are not effective simply because these are the approaches that are consistent with the agencies' standards. Teachers will become literate about instruction only when the instruction permits them to succeed.

Interpreting Data

The biggest single problem of professionalism with educational leaders is their lack of respect for data. There are approaches that work much better than those currently popular in education. There are organizational systems far more effective and no more expensive than those currently used in schools. School decision-makers typically do not consider these alternatives, often do not know that they exist, and rarely have the knowledge and skill needed to implement them. In a very real sense, decision-makers have a serious disability. They lack the knowledge that the public generally supposes they have. The disability is generated largely from their treatment of data. Any district could greatly reduce (probably by more than 75 percent) the incidence of academic child abuse by following sensible, scientific use of data, coupled with the commitment:

- We will search for the approach we think is best and adopt it.
- We will monitor progress carefully.
- We will scrap the approach as soon as we observe that it is not meeting expectations; we will introduce another approach.
- We will keep records and will not make the same mistakes twice.

This commitment is based on the belief that there are approaches that work and that, with training, the average teacher can implement them successfully. Decision-makers must ensure that their commitment is honored. The rules, however, are not as simple as they may seem. For instance, monitoring the approach involves steps that are absolutely foreign to the district. The district has never done it, has no machinery for doing it, and would have to search for methods or design methods that permit monitoring. Fortunately, there are implementations that have demonstrated successful methods. If the district is concerned and dedicated, it will find out about these methods.

Although the commitment and the steps for dealing with outcome data in a responsible manner are relatively simple, the current practices within the schools are roughly the opposite in regard to **every detail** of what should be done.

California

Blatant disregard for data by the schools is illustrated by California, a trend-setting state that is considered a leader in reform but is more accurately a leader in causing academic child abuse (Snider, 1988). In 1976, the legislature enacted a law (Section 60220) that required the State Board to "develop plans to improve the quality and reliability of the instructional materials through learner verification." Learner verification is simply documentation—data—to indicate whether or not programs are effective. The State Board has **not** implemented the law and has done nothing to use learner verification data, even after being ruled illegal and compelled to follow the law by a 1989 Superior Court Decision. (See Judge Long, Statement of Decision, No. 361906, Sacramento, November 14, 1989.)

During the period that the state should have been following the law, it has been guilty of incredible academic child abuse (Anderson, 1988). In math, for example, William Honig was responsible for the state's Mathematics Framework in 1985. The framework was not shaped by "data" or information that was readily available from schools within the state. In 1990, the students who had gone through instructional programs based on the Mathematics Framework for California Schools were evaluated by the National Assessment of Educational Progress. California performed in the lower third of all states. Fewer than ten percent of the eighth-graders performed at or above the seventh-grade level. The average student was two years below grade level, which suggests that the average eighth-grader in California is **learning disabled.** This disability was caused by using programs that have no data base and that are not supported by learner verification.

The state's response to the NAEP math performance showed an expected disregard for data. According to June 17, 1991 *Newsweek*, Associate Superintendent Francie Alexander said, "We've all been led to believe that we were above average." How could the elaborate state bureaucracy, which has access to virtually endless information and data about the schools and their test results, not know facts about how students are performing? To not know is to admit to elitism and gross unprofessionalism.

Honig's response was equally elitist. He announced that he would implement a new math initiative in 100 junior high schools. This revamped curriculum stresses "real-life problem solving, use of calculators and computers, and writing about mathematics." Is this new program shaped by any form of learner-verification data? No. Without apparent concern over the fact that he has produced incredible failure over the last seven years, and without knowledge of whether his new initiative could possibly be effective, Honig arrogantly engages in an experiment that subjects 100 schools full of children to be guinea pigs in another experiment that has very little chance of succeeding. (See *Mathematics Framework Draft*, December, 1990. Note particularly that these activities are **time-consuming** and frequently present only **modest** mathematical content.)

The poor prospect of success derives from the simple fact that the proposed approach has none of the properties that are appropriate for learning-disabled students or low-performing students. Pro-

grams that are successful with these students take a much more structured approach to the teaching of math and to the topic of "problem solving."

Finally, Deputy Superintendent James Smith wrote the editor of *Educational Leadership* on behalf of Honig to explain California's perspective on learner verification. His two most revealing observations are:

1. "The State Curriculum Commission has found the information unreliable and of no use in the past."
2. "There is no requirement to do anything with the data—just receive it from the publisher."

These responses illustrate the disregard educational decision-makers have for data (CCSGOE, 1990). The 1976 legislation called for the board to work out plans to **improve** learner-verification practices. The fact that the Curriculum Commission has found the information of no use in the past may not even be a condemnation of the data, but rather of the Curriculum Commission. There is a strong, negative correlation between programs that receive high recommendations from the commission and "learner verification" data. Programs rejected by the commission in the 1988 adoption of reading-language arts materials had superior learner-verification data while highly rated programs had none and had never been field-tested with children before publication.

Smith's assertion that the data is of no use is consistent with the actions of the board and the Curriculum Commission. The message, however, is frightening. It indicates that for Honig, Smith, Alexander, and the State Board, **no data is better than data.** They would rather trust their rational intuitive powers than rely on fundamental scientific practices. They apparently believe that their knowledge is so reliable that they can inspect programs to determine appropriateness and potential success, without ever subjecting their suppositions to any strict form of empirical verification.

Perhaps the most revealing comment Smith made was that the law did not require the state to do anything with the data, just receive it. The California Education Code is replete with language about "maximizing effectiveness" of instruction. Is the administration so completely insensitive that it would do nothing with the data unless it was ordered to do something by law? The fact that Smith does not know what to do with the data illustrates precisely the learning disability that characterizes the educational machinery in California.

California is not a particularly unusual example of the irresponsible and unprofessional orientation that educational decision-makers have for data. California has been singled out simply because California has served as a flagship for abortive reforms during the Honig era. I'ASC believes that California should receive full credit for the demonstrated incompetence of its decision-makers and for the staggering rate of academic child abuse that it has created under the guise of "reform."

Basic Philosophy of Decision-makers

The basic philosophy of decision-makers is reflected not in their rhetoric (which is typically rich with abstractions about growth and creativity) but in their actual practices. This basic philosophy does not consider data.

1. Teachers are not trained or monitored in the classroom; yet data show that the average teacher is not proficient (or possibly acceptable) at working with lower performers. Data also show that teachers can be uniformly trained to be effective (Abt, 1977).

2. Testing of students is not used to identify problems in a timely fashion and to correct them. End-of-year testing may reveal that teacher X did a horrible job with 26 second graders; however, the problem was not identified before the "achievement test scores" were tallied, and the damage has already occurred. There is no way to turn the clock back and correct the problem in a way that shows concern for the children. (Typically, nothing will be done about the problem during the following year, and teacher X will once more subject many children to academic child abuse.)

3. Children's failure is redefined as success, or the children themselves are considered the cause of their failure. If children who finish the second grade do not read, the administration may present a redefinition of reading that relates reading to "language" in such a way that the performance of a non-reading, word-guessing child is considered acceptable. This sort of game is usually played by schools during the first few grades. At some point, however, the failure is recognized as a failure. Without exception, however, the victim of the experiment is blamed for this failure, and the administration is considered infallible (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1989).

Several studies have documented the assumed infallibility of the schools. One conducted by Galen Alessi (1988) consisted of questions presented to school psychologists who were responsible for about 5,000 learning-disability referrals. The psychologists indicated the percentage of referred problems that were caused by inappropriate curricular practices, by inappropriate administrative decisions, by parents, and by the student. In 100 percent of the cases, the student was identified as the cause of the problem. In zero percent of the cases were the curriculum or the decisions within the school identified as causes of the problem. Coles (1978) examined 1,000 studies of learning disability to identify the number expressing possible relationships between learning disabilities

and school practices. Not one study expressed any relationship.

4. Decision-makers discriminate against children who are at risk by adopting programs that have never been demonstrated to work with lower performers and by establishing criteria that clearly disavow the system of any responsibility for succeeding with these students. In most states, the **average** student is a **low performer** who is "at risk" compared to international counterparts; yet the practices that are required by the state are not designed for low performers. They are elitist in nature and often stupid.

At the same time, criteria and standards used by decision-makers are often outrageous forms of discrimination. For instance, the California 1988 English Language Arts Framework listed effective and ineffective features for language arts programs. One feature had to do with the home environment:

Effective Features	Ineffective Features
A home environment where parents model effective listening, speaking, reading, and writing and offer appropriate help with their children's homework.	A home environment where parents play a passive role as their children are learning the language arts.

Exactly what does this comparison mean? Does it suggest that when a child fails, the home is automatically judged to have failed by not providing adequate models or appropriate "help"? Is the criterion a transparent indicator that the administration has no particular concern with the second-language student, the Black, or the poor? After all, the chances of these children having homes that meet this standard of effectiveness is slim. Apparently, groups like the NAACP, Urban League, and other groups concerned with the rights of minority and poor children are not yet aware of the blatant discrimination used by educational decision-makers. To date, there have been no sustained protests by these organizations and no serious efforts to hold administrators accountable for their results.

5. Because the administration typically does not monitor what happens in the classroom, the administration is further preempted from learning facts about instructional programs. Specifically, the administration does not know whether teacher X partially implements the adopted program, fully implements it, or simply pretends to implement it while actually presenting another approach. Without considering levels of implementation, the administration has no way of determining whether the problems of academic child abuse were created by teachers who did not follow the specifications of the adopted approach or by teachers who follow the specified procedures faithfully.

The fact that the administration does not monitor **levels of implementation** and does not require a high level of implementation creates serious contradictions. An approach is judged to be superior and is installed. The selection of the program implies the belief that the program has the potential to outperform other programs in some way. It would be self-contradictory to suggest that this potential could be realized if teachers **do not** carefully follow whatever the program suggests should be done. If acceptable results could be achieved whether or not the teachers follow the program specifications, it follows that acceptable results would be achievable from a wide range of possible programs. Why, then, did the administration reject some programs?

On the other hand, if the program should be followed carefully to achieve the benefits, why doesn't the district monitor performance in various classrooms? Teachers who do not follow it will ostensibly create failures or fail to realize benefits that are possible by following the program.

That decision-makers do not provide for the monitoring merely reinforces the idea that they are not really concerned with data or know how to use it to reduce academic child abuse.

Summary

Data is not used wisely in education because education is a client-centered, pre-scientific business, much like medieval medicine (which characteristically solicited remedies from the patient in the same way current schools ask parents "what they want").

Those who make decisions have no expertise (no record of achieving superior performance with students). Although they are palpable failures (based on the performance of children who are subjected to their experiments), they continue to apply the elitist philosophy of blaming the victim. They install programs that are consistent with their prejudices. When these programs fail, they blame the changing demography, the home, lack of spunk in the children, or any other correlations that are handy. The assumed infallibility of decision-makers is seen most clearly in their adoption of instructional programs, which is a fad-following process that involves evaluating material according to the criteria of "instant inspection," installing programs that have no record of success, and obscuring the results, rather than identifying problems of academic child abuse and correcting them in a timely fashion.

PART 2—SOLUTIONS

Eliminating Academic Child Abuse

The fight against academic child abuse will have to be led by an informed public. As Part 1 indicated, there is no advocacy system for children within the school. Elitist decision-making practices are overwhelmingly the rule. Children or their homes are blamed for failure. Unfortunately, the legal system provides no relief against irresponsible and unprofessional practices.

Educational leaders and administrators have immunity from legal recourse and are allowed a broad range of irresponsible practices.

Academic child abuse is not recognized as a legal category, nor is educational malpractice. Educational practitioners (teachers, administrators) are not legally accountable for achieving academic performance of a particular level.

There are no pure-food-and-drug counterparts for instructional material. Educational publishers are therefore permitted to publish and promote programs that have been put together by writers and designers who know little about teaching. The programs have not been learner-verified, have very little chance of working with average students, and run a great risk of creating academic child abuse. (The terrible performance of students in math indicates the universality of **instructional material** that fails.)

School districts are also legally permitted to install programs that have no learner verification.

Although the law is little help in reducing academic child abuse, informed parents and groups can demand contractual arrangements with the district that require sensible, data-based practices, and that use the success rate of administrators as the sole basis for retaining them or firing them.

General Considerations

The following facts and guidelines may provide concerned groups with a direction that will keep the central issues in focus and reduce the possibility of the groups becoming embroiled in the administration's agenda items (which frequently obfuscate and complicate issues):

1. The administration will respond to loud and focused demands. The administration is client centered (or gives that impression). If the parents make demands, the administration will almost certainly respond.

2. The school board must be reoriented. The board typically demurs to the administration in academic matters (assuming that the administration has expert knowledge). Also, the board may have been "instructed" not to question academic decisions. This orientation must change. The board must direct the administration in the details of academic planning and must carefully monitor the administration. Interested groups should bring significant pressure against board members and boards not willing to accept responsibility for directing and monitoring an administration that is obviously failing.

3. The board and parent groups should recognize that they know as much about instructional matters as the administration, but also that the administration is quite naive in these matters. Parents should recognize that parents are easily swayed by rhetoric that promises "growth," "fulfillment of potential," "creativity," and other abstractions that have only rarely been realized by the alternative schools and other formats of instruction offered by the administration. Parents and board members should **not** accept the idea that the administration is competent unless the administration provides actual performance data to support the claim of professionalism.

4. The board and parents should not be satisfied with modest improvement. There are effective practices. If the battle against academic child abuse is unwavering and if appropriate sanctions are used, dramatic improvement is possible in any district. Virtually all children can be functioning well in math, reading, writing, and science by the end of the third grade. If the district is required to follow reasonable practices, these outcomes will be achieved.

Basic Strategy

I'ASC believes that educational decision-makers must be held **completely accountable** for the performance of children and for the rate of academic child abuse. If teachers are poorly trained, the administrators are responsible for not seeing to it that they receive training. If an installed approach failed, the administrators who selected the approach or arranged for the selection of the approach have failed.

Failures should not be tolerated. Coaches who have great talent and who produce indifferent results are fired. School administrators work in an area that is far more important. Furthermore, they are provided with children who have great potential (as great as that of children in Hong Kong or Japan) and produce disgraceful results. They are prima facie, not professional. There is no obvious reason why the community should retain them.

Recruiting for superintendents should not be limited to those who have administrative degrees in education. There is no data to suggest that education degrees indicate even modest expertise. If anything, they frequently predict prejudices and elitist prac-

tices. Recruits should be considered from any sphere that requires quality-control practices and commitments to schedules. The commitment should be to install and maintain sensible quality-control practices. The suggestion of not limiting administration candidates to people with educational backgrounds may seem radical; however, an equally radical practice is commonplace—that of recruiting "teachers" who have never studied "education." If acceptable teachers are supposed to emerge from a "liberal arts" background, it should be equally possible for an acceptable administrator to emerge from a non-education background.

Approaches that require outside help are elitist and discriminate most against children who are at risk. Therefore, no instructional approaches should be permitted if they require additional teaching by parents or any special support by others outside the school. Furthermore, whatever approach is selected by the administration must be clearly framed as a response to **current problems** or to anticipated problems. The administration should not be permitted to use the "changing demography" as an after-the-fact excuse. It should clearly understand that the program is installed as a response to: (a) the current performance level of children; (b) the demography of the community; (c) the funding level and availability of resources.

Unless there are serious, unanticipated changes in any of the above, they may not be used as "excuses." This stipulation is very important. Unless the adopted programs are perceived as being potentially "powerful" enough to create desired outcomes within the present set of circumstances, the commitment by the administration becomes very slippery.

The administration should not be permitted to establish process goals, only acceptable outcome goals. If the administration wishes to promise parents "discovery," the promise must be expressed in terms of proficiency that students will have in discovery, not the promise that they will be "meaningfully engaged in discovery activities." Process practices (things to be done, formats, etc.) are understood to be in place with respect to issues covered by the law—health, physical abuse, and various responsibilities associated with the management of the school.

Restrict the standards to outcomes. This will provide greater clarification, both for parents and for administrators. Parents are typically poor judges of how well their children do in school or how good the school program is. Not uncommonly, parent groups support programs that will produce atrocious results. Typically, parents are moved by the administration's rhetoric and interpret promises of "activities" as promises of outcomes. If the promises of benefit were restricted to outcomes, parents would have a clearer appreciation of what the administration is suggesting, and the administration would understand what it is promising to deliver.

Require simple "organizations" within the administration. Both for quality control and for accountability, the organizational structure should be simple enough to permit identification of the single person in the central administration responsible for the performance of a particular school. The basic plan would be: one school, one boss. One central administrator would be solely responsible for the operation of a school, completely accountable for the progress or lack of it. This structure is greatly different from the current arrangements which have various central administrators dealing with aspects of the school. In the one-school, one-boss format, the support services and ancillary functions would be funneled through the central administrator in charge of the school.

Set performance standards that serve for all administrators involved in the schools. These performance standards should be formulated so they are reasonable for someone with professional knowledge of systems and procedures that are effective.

Focus initial reform efforts on grades 1 through 4. Although all grade levels are important and although academic child abuse is possible even if children have been brought to a high level of performance in the first four grades, the problems within the system will be much easier to track if the greatest quality-control and accountability efforts are associated with grades 1 through 4. If good instruction does not occur in these grades, it is unlikely that students will be highly successful in the academic arena. Standards should be expressed as outcomes that are to be tested or documented in a variety of ways, including through the use of standardized measures. Different plans will work. All, however, require identification of "baseline" data.

For math, reading, writing, and other subjects, students should receive tests on what they are supposed to have been taught. The format of the items should be the same as that provided by the instructional material used in the school. The goal is to get information of the extent to which students know what they have been taught (or exposed to).

The data for reading in grades 1 and 2 should be based on the child's ability to decode a 50- to 100-word passage composed entirely of words that have been taught (that the child should know). Different passages should be available to buttress against possible "cheating" by teachers who preteach the test. The child should read the passage aloud and answer comprehension questions.

For math in grades 1 and 2, students should receive simple tests of the problem types they have been taught in their school program. They should work the problem and write the answer to the ques-

tion, if appropriate (not respond to a multiple-choice format).

Establish performance standards for schools, grades, and different populations (based on entering-performance levels). This effort should not be left to the schools without monitoring and input from "judges" outside the school. The schools should be given sufficient time to meet achievable standards. For instance, if initial reading is taught with an appropriate program and with reasonably good (and perfectly attainable) teaching practices, all children with an IQ of 85 and above should decode reasonably well by the end of the first-grade. There should be no non-readers who have attended school regularly. The schools would probably not be able to attain this rate of performance in the first year of a successful implementation simply because of the amount of re-tooling and retraining necessary in the first two grades. A simpler plan is to work in pre-set stages of improvement:

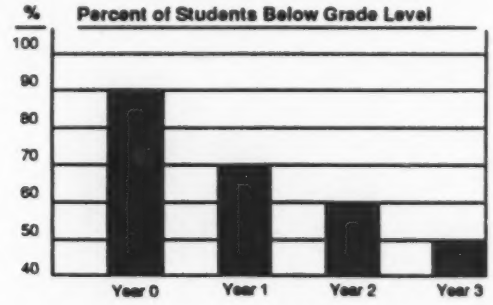
(a) For the first year, a 50 percent reduction in "non-readers."

(b) For the second year, a 50 percent reduction over the preceding year.

(c) For the third year, a reduction to zero percent non-readers.

For a child to be judged a casualty of the school, the child who fails would have had to be in the "normal" IQ range (85 and above) and would have had to be in attendance for at least 160 school days.

Similar improvement schedules should be installed for math and other subjects. If the goal is for students to perform at the eighth-grade level (median performance), the ultimate goal would be for no more than half of the students to score below the eighth-grade level. If 90 percent of the students are currently failing, the goal for the first year would be to reduce the excess number of failures by half (no more than 70 percent scoring below the eighth-grade level). The goal for the second year would be half the remaining difference (no more than 60 percent falling below the eighth-grade level). The goal for the third year would be the terminal goal—no more than 50 percent scoring below eighth-grade level.



Remove Administrators who Fail. Retain administrators (from the superintendent down) only if they meet mandated improvement goals. The goals are actually not that difficult to achieve for one who is familiar with training and instruction. The goals will be incredibly difficult for some administrators; however, these administrators are clearly in the wrong business. If they don't know how to achieve results, they certainly aren't experts in education, and parents should want them removed.

The plan of making employment contingent on results simply permits administrators to bet on their reform plans. As it is now, they install plans, often with great pomp and exuberant promises. The plans fail; the failure is blamed on our children (or teachers, or our community, or our television sets, or our lifestyles, or some combination of the above). But the administrator and the educational leaders who promoted the plan and installed it do not suffer. That is improper. If administrators are convinced that their plan will work, let them bet their job on it. If they are not convinced that it will work, they should probably step aside and let somebody who is more comfortable in the instructional arena take over.

The performance of students should serve as the basis for dismissing (or reassigning and demoting) all administrators who fall short of the first-year's performance objectives.

Various details of the plan should be formulated to assure fairness and to provide sufficient authority so administrators would be able to implement their plan.

Before approving a final plan, the school board should present it to educators who have achieved successful implementations to judge whether the performance goals are readily achievable. If the plan is too ambitious (too many subjects, too much gain required), the plan should be scaled down. The goal is not to fire administrators; rather, it is to change them so they view the performance of students as something closely knit with their own futures. Once administrators catch on to the game, they will show remarkable results.

Challenge Proposals by Educational Leaders

Typically, educational leaders are adequate at identifying problems (which is relatively easy because the problems are obvious), but incompetent at proposing plans that work.

The most serious problem with their plans is that the plans have never been tested nor compared to reasonable alternatives. Often the plan is an attempt to invert a wheel that has been successfully shaped long ago.

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The first step in creating data-based, quality-controlled schools is to challenge implementation of approaches that cannot possibly work well (such as the proposed math programs for junior high schools in California or the implementation of the NCTM Standards for Teaching Math).

The questions used to challenge proposed reforms should be designed to give clear data about the promised benefits of the proposed plan. It should be clear that if these benefits are not realized, those who formulated the plans are not experts and should be removed.

Questions

1. What are the benefits of this plan in terms of student performance?
   a. How much will lower performers gain during the first year, second year, and third year at each grade level? Be specific.
   b. How much will average performers gain during the first year, second year, and third year at each grade level? Be specific.
   c. How much will higher performers gain during the first year, second year, and third year at each grade level? Be specific.
2. What type of measures will be used to determine whether or not the goals are being met in a timely manner?
   a. How will baseline performance be established?
   b. How often will performance be tested/monitored?
   c. Do these tests permit clear comparisons between current performance and anticipated future performance?

   (Note: No high-blown statistical analyses should be permitted. The data should be presented as either raw scores or standard scores that show the range, the average, the median performance, and the standard deviation.)
3. What comparative data do you have to make you believe that the program or approach of your choice is superior to other programs?
   a. Has the program been fieldtested before or after publication?
   b. Has the district run a comparative fieldtest to determine the superiority of the approach?
   c. Did the fieldtest monitor and measure the levels of implementation of participating teachers?
   d. Were the levels of implementation closely correlated with performance of students?
4. What type of training is required to assure that teachers will perform successfully in the proposed approach?
   a. Has the district run trial teacher training programs or observed training provided for others outside the district?
   b. Has the success of the training been documented in terms of ability of teachers to perform uniformly following training?
5. What type of monitoring is required to assure adequate levels of implementation by teachers?
   a. Does the district have a schedule for providing such monitoring? Describe it.
   b. Does the district have necessary personnel for providing such monitoring? Describe it.
   c. Are lines of responsibility clearly defined so that non-performance by teachers can be quickly identified through monitoring and responded to in a timely and effective manner? Describe it.
6. What type of backup plan will be implemented following identification (through 3 above) that students are not progressing as anticipated in the approach?
   a. Have performance danger-signals been identified with respect to the performance of teachers and students? Describe them.
   b. Has a data-based, learner-verified approach been identified to be installed for those students who do not perform adequately in the actual program? Describe it.
   c. Is there a data-based, learner-verified approach that will be installed for all teachers and students should the teachers and/or students perform unacceptably in the original installation? Describe it.

Unless the answers to most of these questions are acceptable, the probability is low that the implementation could succeed.

Typically, the administration will not be able to answer many of these questions, because they present issues the administration has never addressed. The present would be an ideal time for the administration to start addressing them.

The most probable objections that the administration will raise will have to do with money. These are smoke-screen issues. If there's enough money to implement a new approach, there's enough money to collect the kind of data needed to give the administration clear facts about whether or not the approach is succeeding.

Groups interested in serving as advocates for children should see to it that the results are publicized. This may present some problems because the educational press is largely the "friend" of the establishment, particularly on the local level. The current idiom of reporting is to show smiling children draped over a dinosaur and present saccharine prose about the wonderful, cooperative, learning efforts in Mrs. Davis' classroom. There has been no investigative

reporting on matters of academic child abuse.

Groups should lobby for the removal of administrators who are responsible for wholesale academic child abuse.

Shaping Professional Organizations, Major School Districts, and Publishers

I'ASC does not recommend specific instructional practices but does provide the assurance that effective practices exist and that any district with commitment will quickly discover them and will reduce academic child abuse greatly. This effort should take no more than three years if the school or district follows the data-based practices outlined in this paper.

Success in the schools is the most powerful wedge that advocates for school children possess to change the unprofessional practices of larger school districts and of professional organizations.

The various schools that do achieve success will learn facts about children's learning and about effective practices. These schools could help greatly in leading the fight against academic child abuse.

Here are some of the more important I'ASC tasks that successful schools could participate in:

1. ***Establish committees*** that provide national organizations, such as the International Reading Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, with feedback on their unprofessional endorsements. Specifically, if these organizations endorse approaches without first running a reasonable test of the approaches, their judgment is suspect and their endorsement is unprofessional. If the NCTM is to endorse the use of "manipulatives," the organization should be able to produce hard data to suggest that there are obvious performance or time-saving benefits over other approaches that have been demonstrated to be successful. The stipulation of success is very important. Nobody is particularly interested in the fact that the use of manipulatives might result in better performance than some other approach that has never worked well.

I'ASC will attempt to present at national meetings and at local meetings of national organizations. The purpose should be to provide feedback about decisions that are apparently unprofessional. Districts that have successful implementations should provide professional organizations with information about the approach that works. In virtually all cases, the approach that works is vastly different from those endorsed by the national organizations.

2. ***Attend public meetings*** held by state or local adoption committees and challenge approaches that are not data-based. Although California has been judged illegal in not formulating "learner-verification plans," the state is preparing to adopt a framework on math that has no safeguards against academic child abuse. Schools that are successful in minimizing academic child abuse should inform the state board about what makes for successful implementations.

3. ***Increase public awareness of academic child abuse.*** Parents are not knowledgeable about how well their children are doing in school, whether the school approach is reasonable, or what kind of performance would be anticipated if sound instructional practices were in place. Only through the efforts of groups like I'ASC will parents be provided with informed professional judgment about the nonprofessional and often experimental practices that are used in schools.

4. ***Lobby for legislation that guards against academic child abuse.*** Educational publishers should not be permitted to create material that satisfies the prejudices of their major adopting customers but that is an experiment that involves children. Legislation prohibiting programs that haven't been validated to be used in the state should be supported. Similar legislation should be sought on the federal level for federally funded programs. If our nation is concerned with academic performance, it should recognize that academic success will not spring from the inane activities that constitute current development processes used by major educational publishers. Studies show that teachers rarely teach better than the material they use. If the material is careless, the children suffer.

Summary

Rhetoric has ruled educational practices too long. Our children are not learning disabled; yet they become disabled through our educational system. Our educational system is designed and run by educational decision-makers. They are the failures. Their elitist practices must stop. The public must recognize them as failures and replace them with those who will honor traditions of scholarship and sensible scientific practices, such as using data and quality-control measures to protect our children's future.

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